

VZCZCXRO6854

OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN  
RUEHLZ RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHRS RUEHSL RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHNY #0092/01 0491536  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O R 181534Z FEB 10  
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0037  
INFO EU INTEREST COLLECTIVE  
EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OSLO 000092

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: OSLO MUSLIMS PROTEST DAGBLADET'S PUBLISHING OF A PROPHET  
MOHAMMAD CARICATURE

REF: 09 OSLO 403; 09 OSLO 713

11. (U) Summary: Norwegian left-leaning daily Dagbladet's published a front-page photo February 3 of suspected terrorist Arfan Bhatti pointing out that a Prophet Mohammad caricature was available through a link on the Police Security Services' (PST) Facebook page. The fact that the caricature could clearly be seen, led to peaceful protests on February 12 and 13, and sparked renewed debate among political parties and the Norwegian Muslim community. This also became a major story in the Norwegian press with protest organizer Mohyeldeen Mohammad's statement serving as a flash-point in what one political party leader termed the "stealth Islamification" of Norway. End Summary

#### Reaction to the Publication

-----

12. (U) The caricature, published on Dagbladet's front page, depicts the prophet Mohammed as a pig writing the Koran. In 1997, this particular image had led to riots, flag burning and a suicide bombing in Israel after a Russian-Jewish immigrant Tatiana Susskind posted copies of it across the Palestinian city of Hebron. Dagbladet's Editor in Chief Lars Helle wrote an editorial on February 8 stating that no one had the right to demand that Norwegian media be censored by anyone's religious views. Helle then met Oslo Imam Mehboob ur-Rehman February 9 for a reconciliation meeting set up by Oslo Conservative Party politician Amir Sheikh (a key Embassy contact who awarded President Obama the Bridge Builder Award last year). Asked by ur-Rehman to apologize, Helle refused. He said that Dagbladet printed the cartoon to show what was linked to the PST Facebook profile, and not, as protesters claimed, to provoke Muslims. Liberal Muslim Amal Aden told centrist daily Aftenposten February 12 that the printing of this cartoon is particularly offensive and hampers the important work of dialogue and integration. The Iranian Embassy in Oslo issued an e-mail condemning the publication, stating that Dagbladet's printing of the drawing was a regrettable provocation, as it served no purpose other than to incite intolerance and hate.

#### Peaceful Protests

-----

13. (U) The February 12 demonstration's principal organizer, 24-year old Mohyeldeen Mohammad (also known as Mohyeldeen Bin Hamad) and leader of a young, more radical group called "The Volunteers" was widely reported as saying Allah would determine

whether the demonstrations would turn violent, although he clearly stated in a TV interview February 10 that he would work to ensure a peaceful demonstration. Mohammad explained that the demonstration was not only against Dagbladet, but against the Norwegian government for allowing an "anti-Muslim crusade" to exist in Norway. Arfan Bhatti (reftel A and B), awaiting re-trial for an attempted murder charge and previously charged and acquitted of plotting attacks against the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Oslo, was also listed as a demonstration organizer. Bhatti's exact role in organizing the protest was unclear, although he was prominently featured in photos, wearing an orange security vest as part of the informal security provided by the organizers. He attempted to downplay his own involvement, but he was aware that his presence as a quasi-organizer of the protests brought heightened interest in them. A police official commented that Bhatti was behaving as an agitator rather than a leader.

¶4. (U) The demonstration started with a prayer service, followed by speakers, including Mohyeldeen Mohammad, who told the demonstrators that Norway would experience a September 11 or July 7 (date of 2005 terrorist attack in London), adding that it was a warning, not a threat, if Norway did not show more respect. After thirty minutes, the crowd quickly grew to almost 3000 demonstrators. While the media reported the protest as peaceful overall, initial reporting called the protest "out of control" and unlawful, as the crowd marched from their approved location

OSLO 00000092 002 OF 002

(University Square) to Oslo Central Station, which was not allowed by their permit. The Islamic Council of Norway Secretary General Shoiab Sultan discouraged Norwegian Muslims from participating in the protest because he feared the demonstration's organizers had an agenda that did not reflect the views of most Muslims in Norway. Post has good contacts with the Islamic Council of Norway: current President Senaid Kobilica is in the U.S. on an International Visitors Leadership program. In an interview with news service NTB on February 12, the Muslim conservative columnist Usman Rana supported the demonstrators' right to voice their concern but urged a peaceful demonstration. Usman Rana previously headed the Muslim Student Society and remains an important columnist and medical student who has been an exchange student in the U.S. and an advocate for U.S. style integration. On February 13 around 200-300 Muslims marched in Oslo, partly in protest against what they perceive as anti-Muslim sentiments in Norway, but also to distance themselves from the February 12 demonstration and Mohammad's statements. Also, in response to the printing of the Muhammad caricatures, approximately 1,000 taxi drivers in Oslo and Akershus counties went on strike in the busy hours on February 6. Through text messages taxi drivers were encouraged to participate in more strikes. Another three hour long strike was held on the morning rush hour on February 8.

Mohyeldeen Mohammad

-----

¶5. (U) Since the protest, the media has turned the spot light on Mohyeldeen Mohammad. He responded to one of many interview requests and questions by agreeing that homosexuals should be stoned to death. As a result, The Norwegian LGBT Association reported him to the police for violation Section 227 of the Norwegian General Civil Penal Code for making threats. The following day, he was placed under arrest after being reported to the police by Dagbladet, for threatening two of its journalists. He was later released by the police with a caution, although he had initially gone to the police station seeking protection due to several threatening e-mails and sms he has received since the demonstration.

¶6. (U) Norwegian media Progress Party Leader (FrP) Siv Jensen said February 13 that when she warned against the "stealth Islamification of Norwegian society" last year, she was made a laughing stock, and accused the GoN of not doing enough to defend freedom of expression, implying that Foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre was spineless. He responded by accusing her of spreading fear. Noting that Jensen was highly selective when she spoke of freedom of expression, Støre said "She is all for freedom of expression in principle until a lawful demonstration is held against something she does not like; the very idea of freedom of expression is that you have to tolerate things that you deeply disagree with." PM Jen Stoltenberg commented to VG that Mohyeldeen Mohammed's remarks about a 9/11 on Norwegian soil verged on exhortation to terror. He characterized himself as an uncompromising defender of freedom of expression, but noted that the Government and the Storting have tightened restrictions on "preparing for or exhorting to" terrorism.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The fact that the protests remained peaceful and that influential leaders in the Muslim community discouraged demonstration attendance due to Bhatti's and Mohammad's involvement is a positive indicator that mainstream leaders reject violence and extremism. The debate also revealed that a significant number of Muslims feel alienated in Norway, which could contribute to the growing appeal of people like Mohammad and Bhatti. Also, before this incident, radical Islam did not have a "face" in Norway. Many people feared it existed, but only now has it been brought to the surface with Mohammad and his sympathizers, which many consider a good thing. Commentators have expressed concern that more extreme views are growing among, second-generation Muslims in Norway, similar to situations in the UK and in Denmark. End Comment.  
WHITE